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Sixty-fourth year

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6100th meeting

Wednesday, 25 March 2009, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Dabbashi	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Ebner
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	China	Mr. Huang Hongjiang
	Costa Rica	Mr. Guillermet
	Croatia	Ms. Čačić
	France	Ms. Lecoq
	Japan	Mr. Okuda
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Turkey	Mr. Dizdar
	Uganda	Mr. Kamahungye
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Bentall
	United States of America	Ms. Germain
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.15 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to remind all speakers, as indicated this morning, to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Moreno Fernández (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the Security Council on behalf of the 118 members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In compliance with your request, Mr. President, I shall deliver an abridged version of the statement prepared by the Movement, which will be circulated in its entirety in the Council Chamber.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns Israel's continuing occupation of Palestinian territory in breach of international law and United Nations resolutions. In that regard, the Movement condemns in the strongest terms the recent Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, which resulted in the death of more than 1,400 Palestinians, including hundreds of children and women, the injury of more than 5,500 Palestinians and widespread displacement, making thousands of Palestinian families homeless and deepening the suffering and fear that overwhelm the population.

The Non-Aligned Movement also condemns Israel's wanton destruction of thousands of Palestinian homes and businesses, vital civilian infrastructure and United Nations facilities, including several schools where frightened Palestinian families had sought refuge but were nonetheless attacked by the Israeli occupying forces. The Movement calls upon Israel to immediately cease its military aggression against the Palestinian people and stresses the importance of attaining a permanent and lasting ceasefire, beginning in the Gaza Strip and extending to the West Bank. The Movement also expresses its support for Egypt's efforts in that regard.

We reiterate our condemnation of Israel's inhumane and unlawful closure and blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the virtual imprisonment of the entire Palestinian civilian population. The Movement expresses its serious concern about the grave deterioration of socio-economic conditions and the deepening humanitarian crisis as a result of the blockade, which has caused increased and widespread privation, poverty and hardship, in addition to the vast trauma and suffering inflicted by the military aggression.

The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel cease such illegal practices against the Palestinian people and put a permanent end to its illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip by allowing the immediate and sustained opening of all Gaza border crossings needed to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and to meet the urgent reconstruction and economic recovery needs of the Palestinian people.

The Movement reminds the international community, including the Security Council, of its responsibility to guarantee an in-depth investigation of all the crimes and violations committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip and to ensure that serious follow-up efforts are made to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes answer for them. Israel's impunity and its blatant disregard for and defiance of the law must come to an end. We await the report of the Board of Inquiry dispatched to Gaza by the Secretary-General. We call for immediate action to follow up the findings of the Board's investigation and for the immediate dispatch of the fact-finding mission called for by the Human Rights Council as recently called for in Geneva by the non-aligned countries.

The Movement reiterates its strong condemnation of Israel's continuing intensive campaign of building settlements throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular in and around occupied East Jerusalem. Such Israeli policies and measures constitute grave breaches of international law and flagrant defiance of United Nations resolutions and the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. We stress the incompatibility of negotiations on the peace process with such unlawful colonization activities, which are clearly aimed at the illegal acquisition and de facto annexation of more Palestinian land and at forcibly imposing a unilateral solution. The Movement emphasizes that the illegal Israeli colonization campaign in its entirety is gravely undermining the contiguity, integrity, viability and unity of the occupied Palestinian territory and jeopardizing the prospects for physically achieving the solution of two States living in peace.

The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel immediately cease all of its colonization activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and reaffirms that those unlawful measures cannot alter the terms of reference of the peace process nor negate the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Movement also demands that the international community take urgent action to compel the occupying Power to abide by all of its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, United Nations resolutions, the advisory opinion and its obligations under the road map.

The Government of Lebanon has continuously endeavoured to stabilize the situation in its territory following Israel's brutal aggression and serious violations of its territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its satisfaction with the steps taken by the Lebanese Government to implement resolution 1701 (2006), including the deployment of its armed forces along the northern and eastern borders of Lebanon to ensure security and stability on the borders.

The Movement remains deeply concerned about Israel's ongoing air and land violations of the Blue Line in breach of resolution 1701 (2006). We strongly urge Israel to end the occupation of the northern part of Ghajar village, north of the Blue Line, and refrain from any violation of Lebanese sovereignty and of resolution 1701 (2006), as well as any provocation of the Lebanese armed forces or the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

The Movement also calls for the prompt settlement of the question of the Shaba'a farms, in full respect for Lebanese territorial integrity, as stipulated in resolution 1701 (2006). We urge all parties to cooperate in protecting Lebanon's sovereign rights in that area and we note the important efforts made by the Secretary-General in that regard.

The Movement is fully aware of the enormous challenge facing Lebanon as a result of the 1.2 million cluster bombs launched by Israel during its aerial attack on the country. The Movement once again condemns the use of such weapons by Israel and deplores the resulting death toll. The Non-Aligned Movement strongly urges Israel to provide the exact location of explosives planted on Lebanese territory, as well as maps of the location of the landmines planted during its occupation of southern Lebanon.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, that purport to alter the legal, physical or demographic character or institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, including efforts to impose its jurisdiction and administration there, are null, void and have no legal effect. We also reaffirm that all of those measures, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, constitute violations of international law, international agreements and the United Nations Charter and its resolutions, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981), as well as the Fourth Geneva Convention. They are also in defiance of the international community. The Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the Occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

At this critical period in the Middle East, particularly with regard to the long and tragic question of Palestine, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its intention to continue to lend its support and actively contribute in every possible way to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East based on all relevant United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express my delegation's pleasure at seeing you, Sir, personally presiding over the Security Council this month. We are confident that having the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in this prominent position will help promote the agenda and efforts of the international community to reach viable solutions to the problems of today, in particular with regard to the Middle East and Africa. We also express our great appreciation for the efforts of the Permanent Representative of Japan and the members of his delegation throughout the previous month. I also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing earlier.

The United Nations can no longer address the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine as if it were business as usual. The inability of the Security Council to carry out its basic duties cannot be allowed

to produce disastrous results for our region and its peoples, namely, aggression, colonization, continued Israeli occupation and suffering. The United Nations in general and the Security Council in particular are therefore called upon to rise to the level of the purposes and principles of the Charter by trying to implement at least some of the hundreds of resolutions and decisions adopted in this international Organization since its inception to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, stop its violations of human rights there and halt its practices that contravene international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. That is the most important thing as we discuss the agenda item on the situation in the Middle East in the Security Council. That is at the heart of the matter. We should not be sidetracked by the representative of Israel as we discuss an issue that has been before the Council for decades.

Arab States endeavoured to establish peace at the Beirut Summit of 2002 and at the recently held 2008 summit in Damascus. They have also reiterated the need to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Meanwhile, instead of reaching out to the Arab hand outstretched in peace, Israel responded by attacking the West Bank and carrying out the Jenin and Nablus massacres, enforcing a blockade on the defenceless Palestinian people, and by specializing in killing women and children, desecrating places of worship, changing the character of Jerusalem and Judaizing it, carrying out a scorched-earth policy and collective punishment and mass arrests and building settlements and constructing the racist separation wall on occupied Palestinian lands. That is Israel's record with regard to the item now under consideration, which is the situation in the Middle East.

Not satisfied with these cumulative, provocative violations, Israel carried out its brutal aggression against Lebanon in the summer of 2006 and another aggression against Gaza recently. This entailed war crimes and crimes against humanity, which, as the Council knows, outraged international public opinion. International opinion now demands with unprecedented insistence that the Israeli perpetrators of these crimes be put on trial.

Recently, 16 prominent international personalities, including senior judges and human rights advocates, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ms. Mary Robinson and Justice Richard Goldstone, sent a letter to the Secretary-General in which they called for an immediate, independent international inquiry into Israel's violations of international law during its recent aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza. Richard Falk, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, described this aggression as a war crime. In this context, our delegation will follow the situation carefully, as the Secretary-General carries out his commitment to forward to the Security Council the findings of the Board of Inquiry dispatched to Gaza, headed by Ian Martin, as soon as possible.

We must not overlook the article that *The Guardian* published setting out the first-hand testimony of Israeli soldiers and officers who participated in the aggression against Gaza, soldiers and officers who targeted Palestinian ambulances and medical relief workers, and who killed 47 among them.

Nor must we overlook the testimony of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. She spoke of a young Palestinian boy, not even 12 years old, who was used by the Israeli army in Gaza as a human shield. They placed him in front of an Israeli tank to protect the tank from Palestinians who were trying to defend themselves. The outcome was that the Israelis themselves shot 70 bullets into the body of this young Palestinian boy.

Israel's continued disregard for the Security Council and its continued waste of the Council's time would astonish even forerunners of the theatre of the absurd, such as Kafka and Kierkegaard, for those who are interested in such matters. It is now time for this Council to put an end to Israel's absurdist acts before this esteemed Council. The question that remains is this: If the Arab hand outstretched in peace does not meet a hand outstretched from the other side, what reason is there to keep this Arab hand outstretched in peace? Would it please the international community to see the peace process collapse and its foundations falter?

The continued occupation of Arab land in Palestine, the intensified settlement and colonization activities in the Syrian Golan and in Palestine and

Israel's persistence in occupying Lebanese territories and in refusing to abide by legitimate international resolutions in order to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East have all led to an escalation of tensions, an absence of stability and security in the region and a situation that is deteriorating in all its aspects. The international community, in particular the Security Council, is called upon to hold Israel's leaders accountable for their repeated crimes, which are legally defined as war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide. What Israel is doing to Palestinians is the true holocaust.

Despite Israel's desperate attempts to justify its aggression against Gaza, what it is doing now in the West Bank and Jerusalem reveals its true intentions towards the Palestinian people. Israel is not content with its racist policies and its practices of coercion. It has escalated its brutal attacks against the residents of Jerusalem who live close to the Al-Aqsa mosque, demolishing their homes and displacing them in an attempt to breach the sanctity and diminish the significance of the Al-Aqsa mosque and to Judaize the city of Jerusalem. Israel's decision to demolish 88 homes in the village of Silwan near the Al-Aqsa mosque and its continued excavations under the mosque are nothing but an attempt to carry out a preconceived plan to take control of the mosque and demolish it. They are deceiving themselves when they think in such a manner.

An even more repugnant and surreal manifestation of the conduct of the Israeli occupation authorities is the fact that these authorities impose a fine of $20,000 on any Palestinian whose home these authorities demolish. Their justification is that this money is to cover the expenses of the demolition. What does the Council think of that? Israel is thus asking the Palestinians to pay the price of the bullets it will use to shoot them. How surreal, how sadistic this is.

It is also strange that the Israeli Government has issued a decision preventing any Palestinian cultural activity in Jerusalem, which by an Arab decision was declared the Arab cultural capital. In parallel, Israel continues its settlement activities in the occupied Arab territories and the construction of the racist separation wall in blatant violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Today is also the sixth anniversary of the assassination of American peace activist Rachel Corrie, who was run over by an Israeli bulldozer because she opposed the demolition of Palestinian homes to build the separation wall.

Most of the world's countries and every United Nations body have adopted clear positions condemning Israeli settlement activities, which impede the establishment of peace, are in contradiction to the pledges made at Annapolis, constitute a genuine obstacle to peace and lead to an escalation of tensions in the region.

Syria reaffirms its steadfast and continuous support for the rights of the Palestinian people to regain their occupied land and establish their own independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital. We also reiterate the need for an immediate end to the oppressive blockade against the Palestinian people in Gaza, for the reopening of all crossings, for the reconstruction of Gaza and for international guarantees to prevent Israel from demolishing again the facilities and infrastructure that are to be rebuilt.

In order to demonstrate its solidarity with the Palestinian people, Syria took part in the Sharm el-Sheikh conference and has participated in the international efforts to rebuild Gaza. Syria reaffirms the need to restore Palestinian national unity through a national dialogue so as to strengthen the Palestinian negotiating position and the resolve of its people. As Chair of the Arab summit, Syria is striving to achieve that unity.

Israel continues to refuse to return occupied Golan to Syria, and to abide by legitimate international resolutions, especially resolution 497 (1981). Israeli actions in the occupied Syrian Golan have exceeded every legal and moral boundary. It has pursued its policy of terrorizing and suppressing Syrian citizens of the Golan, arresting them and placing them in detention centres in conditions that jeopardize their lives. In that connection, I would like in particular to mention our national Bashir Al-Muqt. My Government has appealed to the Secretary-General and the Red Cross to save his life. In that regard, we appeal to the United Nations and the Security Council to pressure Israel to release Syrian captives, including journalist Atta Farhat, who was arrested by Israel because of his nationalist journalistic work, given a show trial and sentenced to three years in prison.

Israeli occupying authorities continue to expropriate land and to expand their illegitimate and illegal settlements in the Syrian Golan. With the

approval of the occupation Government, the so-called Golan Regional Council on settlements decided to begin the construction of new housing on 40 dunums of land near the Israeli settlement of Aniam, which was established on the ruins of the Syrian village of Al-Tibah. Representatives from Israeli parties in the settlement of Qatzrin, which was built on the ruins of the Syrian village of Kasreen, signed a joint cooperation agreement to coordinate their efforts to oppose any Israeli withdrawal from the Golan. The Israeli army has also recently carried out massive military exercises in the occupied Golan, employing all sorts of land, naval and air weaponry.

I would like to remind the Council that the number of victims of Israeli landmines in the occupied Syrian Golan stands at 531, including 202 fatalities, most of whom were children. That is in addition to the 329 injured persons with permanent multiple disabilities.

Israel continues to refuse to allow the resumption of family visits by Syrian citizens in the occupied Golan through the Quneitra crossing point. My country has sent letters in that regard to the Secretary-General, the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly and governmental and non-governmental organizations, calling for their intervention to immediately resolve this urgent humanitarian issue. We have yet to see any success in the efforts of those parties to support international humanitarian law and human rights law.

In conclusion, Syria has made the strategic choice of a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the well-known terms of reference for peace, including resolutions of international legitimacy. By definition, that entails the return of all occupied Arab territories, including occupied Syrian Golan, a return to the lines of 4 June 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital. The continuation of the occupation is a contradiction of peace. By definition, too, that requires mobilizing all possible means to put an end to it.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Palouš (Czech Republic): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries of Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia align themselves with this statement.

The European Union welcomed the cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip. Since then, it has been using every opportunity to call on all parties to make the current ceasefire permanent through the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009). Noting the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the issues which should be addressed without any delay include a sustained halt to rocket launches towards Israel, the urgent opening of the Gaza crossings on a regular and predictable basis, and an effective mechanism to prevent arms and ammunition smuggling into the Gaza Strip.

The European Union deeply deplores the loss of life during this conflict, particularly the civilian casualties. We continue to remind all parties to the conflict to fully respect human rights and comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. The European Union will closely follow investigations into alleged violations of international humanitarian law.

The European Union is gravely concerned by the humanitarian situation on the ground and calls for the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. Only the immediate and unconditional reopening of all crossings for the passage of humanitarian aid will reverse the current humanitarian deterioration.

The European Union has on several occasions declared its readiness not only to step up its already substantial emergency aid contribution, but also to work towards the rehabilitation, reconstruction, sustainable economic recovery and future economic development of the Gaza Strip. The European Union welcomed the Palestinian Authority's plan for the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza. We believe that the recent conference in Sharm el-Sheikh was a success, both in raising the necessary funds for reconstruction and economic development and — maybe even more importantly — in sending a clear signal in support of the Palestinian National Authority.

The European Union is the largest donor. The European Commission provided €554 million in 2009, in addition to the bilateral contributions of EU member States. The EU is determined to play a substantial role,

alongside the United States and Arab countries, in alleviating the dire situation in Gaza. The European Union will continue to support the Palestinian economy as a whole. While focusing our attention on Gaza, we must not forget to address the needs in the West Bank, since both territories constitute the pillars of a future Palestinian State that is viable, contiguous and democratic, living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

Unhindered passage of humanitarian aid, people and commercial goods must be allowed in order to ensure recovery and reconstruction and provide hope for a better future. The European Union has constantly pushed for the sustained reopening of Gaza's borders on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access and is prepared to reactivate, and possibly extend, its assistance in the management of Gaza's borders. Another essential prerequisite for the sustainable recovery and development of Palestinian society, both in Gaza and in the West Bank, is intra-Palestinian reconciliation. The European Union welcomes the reconciliation process launched at the meeting of all Palestinian factions, held in Cairo on 26 February, and strongly encourages reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas. In this respect, we commend Egypt and the Arab League partners for their mediation efforts.

We are in a transition period waiting for new Israeli and interim Palestinian Governments to be formed. But no matter what their composition, the European Union clearly expects their representatives to honour obligations entered into by their predecessors.

The European Union reiterates its condemnation of the continuing firing of rockets into southern Israel. The European Union also condemns Israel's planned settlement activities. The European Union urgently calls on Israel to reconsider the planned construction of settlements, which would be in violation of international law and would run counter to the Road Map and commitments made by Israel to the Palestinians and the international community in Annapolis in November 2007.

The European Union has consistently made clear that there can be no sustainable peace in the Middle East without the creation of a viable Palestinian State. Continued settlement activity severely damages that prospect. The European Union is also deeply concerned by the issuing of eviction notices in East Jerusalem, which, combined with the increase in settlement activities, further threatens the chances of peace. We call on Israel to suspend these eviction notices immediately.

The European Union strongly supports a two-State solution as the only realistic option to meet the expectations of both peoples to live in peace and security alongside each other. This perspective was also reaffirmed at the first meeting of the Middle East Quartet with the participation of the new United States Administration on the margins of the Sharm el-Sheikh conference.

However, there is no solidified truce around Gaza at this stage. We continue to support Egyptian efforts towards this goal and encourage all parties to come to an agreement as soon as possible. The European Union is convinced that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in Gaza or elsewhere. Peace in the Middle East requires a comprehensive solution through a lasting and just settlement of the conflict on all its tracks, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Road Map and previous agreements reached between the parties. We consider the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 to be a solid and appropriate basis for achieving stability, peace and security in the region. The European Union stands ready to actively work towards that goal.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): Brazil welcomes the convening of this timely debate, an initiative that speaks to Libya's commitment to the efforts by the United Nations to bring peace to the Middle East. I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing.

A little more than two months after the conflict in Gaza and a few weeks after the donor conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, this debate should reinforce the resolve of the international community not only to speed up reconstruction of the war-torn Gaza Strip, but also to advance the peace process as a whole. It is necessary to take stock of the situation and to devise a common strategy that allows the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State at a very early date, living side by side in peace and security with Israel within internationally recognized borders.

This goal requires the resumption of negotiations between the parties in good faith. Brazil welcomes the Palestinian political forces' willingness to form a reconciliation government. We recognize the role of Egypt in bringing about those developments. The expansion of settlements by Israel and the frequent use of violence — serious obstacles to the two-State solution — should be immediately stopped. More than ever, persuasion from the international community is an essential ingredient of the achievement of peace.

Brazil firmly believes that all actors in the region that are prepared to act constructively should be given a chance to participate in the peace process. By the same token, bringing developing countries from outside the region to the discussions would also add fresh ideas to the talks. Brazil attended the Annapolis Conference and encourages the holding of a follow-up conference as a matter of urgency.

We expect that the new government being formed in Israel will not only fulfil the international commitments already in place, but also engage fully in the peace process.

At this juncture, it is very important to support the Palestinian Authority and to help it strengthen its institutions and its ability to make a difference in the everyday lives of the Palestinian population.

With respect to Gaza, all parties must fully implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), without preconditions.

The reality on the ground calls for immediate action. That includes the permanent reopening of all crossings into Gaza, so that the flow of humanitarian aid and of regular trade can be normalized. On the Palestinian side, violence against Israeli civilians, including the launching of rockets, must cease.

In the recent times of heightened tension, Brazil has continued and even increased its cooperation efforts with the Palestinian Authority. We emphasize the need to bring a clear and consistent improvement to the daily lives of the people of Palestine. During his visit to the region during the conflict, Foreign Minister Celso Amorim delivered, on behalf of the Brazilian Government and people, 14 tons of food and medicine to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

That was not an isolated event. In the donor conferences held in Stockholm and Paris, Brazil donated a total of $10.5 million. Our contribution in Paris was the largest Brazil has ever made and one of the highest among non-Islamic developing countries. These resources are now being employed in a wide range of projects on the ground that are meant to have a direct positive impact on the local population: the construction of schools, the establishment of fish farms and the management of communal lands, to mention just a few. Together with our partners India and South Africa in the framework of the IBSA Fund, we pledged an additional $3 million over three years and are now pursuing the construction of a sports centre in Ramallah scheduled to start in April.

In Sharm el-Sheikh, Foreign Minister Amorim announced the donation of a further $10 million for the reconstruction of Gaza. On that occasion, IBSA also announced its cooperation for the reconstruction of Gaza. Next April, a high-level Brazilian delegation will visit the West Bank to hold talks with the Palestinian authorities on cooperation in the area of public policy.

In cooperation with the Department of Public Information, Brazil will host the 2009 International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East in Rio de Janeiro next July. We hope that the event can make a contribution to the peace process through dialogue between the parties, including their civil societies.

Let me say a few words about Lebanon, a country with which Brazil also has strong ties. The steady implementation of the Doha agreement and the scheduling of legislative elections for next June are encouraging developments. The Lebanese people will once again be able to solve problems in a democratic and peaceful way. We note with appreciation the calm situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, but we appeal to all parties to implement in full resolution 1701 (2006).

By the end of March, the second South America-Arab Countries Summit will take place in Qatar. We are confident that it will help to further identify opportunities to enhance relations and cooperation between the two regions.

In concluding, I would say that, in recent months there have been tragic setbacks in the Middle East. The situation in Gaza remains intolerable. The Council and the international community as a whole must live up to their responsibilities. It is no longer the time for a peace process; it is high time for peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to express my great pleasure at seeing the brother country of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya at the helm of the Security Council as the Council is addressing the situation in the Middle East — something that has been on the agenda of the Organization since its creation. I must commend the professionalism and effectiveness displayed by the Japanese presidency last month. I also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing and report on developments in the Palestinian situation.

After the Israeli aggression against Gaza, the entire world has been able to see the atrocities committed against Palestinians and their property. Palestinians have been orphaned and dispersed and their homes destroyed. That has happened in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, as stated recently by the Special Rapporteur for human rights in the Palestinian territories. The aggression has halted, but the Palestinian people are still awaiting the opening of border crossings, the lifting of the siege, reconstruction, and a return to normal life with all its components.

In solidarity with the Palestinian people in these trials, His Majesty the King of Morocco, during the first week of aggression, ordered that food and medical supplies be provided and medical teams sent to lend support to Palestinians in hospitals. Contributions for reconstruction have also been made by the Moroccan people, including for the reconstruction of Gaza and a wing of the Al-Quds Hospital. Fifteen million dollars has been committed by His Majesty for the reconstruction effort.

The statements made by Israel on returning to negotiations do not absolve it of its crimes and its collective punishment, its intensified settlement activities, and its occupation of the Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The policy of demographic change and the Judaization of East Jerusalem is contrary to resolutions of international legitimacy, the Road Map and the principle of land for peace. The destruction of a historic cemetery, with a museum to be built in its place, is a violation of Palestinian rights and a desecration of holy places as defined by UNESCO. His Majesty the King, as Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, has addressed a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to the permanent members of the Security Council, in which he condemned the intentions of the Israeli authorities against the inhabitants of al-Bustan neighbourhood near Silway, near Al-Aqsa Mosque, which was built before the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem. His Majesty the King urged that those practices be abandoned and that the pursuit of peace and the rule of international law prevail.

Morocco supports a return to the negotiating table and wishes to encourage an environment conducive to that and to reunifying Palestinian factions on the basis of intra-Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation, including the consolidation of the Arab and Palestinian positions in all international forums. We also urge that all good offices continue to be deployed, in particular the good offices of our Egyptian brothers, in order to achieve that goal.

My country states that it is important that an international process fostering the Arab Peace Initiative commence. The Arab Peace Initiative is indeed an essential and realistic basis for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Initiative is based on the Arab strategic choice of peace, the principle of land for peace, the creation of a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, and respect by Israel of its international and regional agreements.

Lastly, on behalf of Morocco, I wish to state once again our full and continued support for the Palestinian people's right to an independent viable State of their own, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and also our support for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict so that there might be peace and stability for all the peoples of the region, to make cooperation and recovery possible.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call next on the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar): Allow me at the outset to salute you, Mr. President, and congratulate you on your appointment as Permanent Representative of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations in New York. I wish to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and to commend you for all your efforts and endeavours on this item: the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I

would also like to thank Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on behalf of the Secretary-General.

This is the first time that the Security Council is holding an open debate since the end of what the Israeli occupation forces dubbed "Operation Cast Lead" in the occupied Gaza Strip. It is needless to remind the Council of the deaths, destruction and tragedies that resulted from that three-week military campaign launched by the Israeli authorities on a people that are suffering the worst humanitarian situation in the world. Nor do I think that I need to repeat what the Council has been hearing frequently over many months about the serious consequences of the Israeli blockade and siege imposed on Gaza Strip and the grave humanitarian situation resulting therefrom.

While the worst forms of aggression have stopped, the aggression is still continuing today. Indeed, it has been going on for years, for the siege, the blockade, the starvation imposed on the people of Gaza are a form of aggression. Consequently, the cessation of hostilities in itself is not enough. It is necessary now to lift the siege on Gaza, to open the crossings and to ensure the freedom of movement of persons, goods, materials and of the equipment necessary for reconstruction. In general, we must put an end to this policy of collective punishment and ensure the protection of Palestinian people.

The end of military aggression does not necessarily mean that we forget about the terrible atrocities that have been committed by the Israeli war machine against the unarmed civilians in the stricken Palestinian territory. The Israeli aggression on Gaza has been marked by many war crimes and crimes against humanity. Worse yet, the entire war constituted a war crime, because it included violations of international law, international treaties, relevant international humanitarian law and even the norms of warfare. The military operation was not balanced, but rather a unilateral massacre, as described by Dr. Kevin Cahill, Chief Adviser for Humanitarian Affairs of the President of the General Assembly. Therefore, we must investigate those violations and bring their perpetrators to justice in order to do justice for the victims and prevent such criminal acts from ever being committed again.

Many serious human rights violations were clearly evident, including the use of prohibited chemical weapons such as white phosphorous and the targeting of densely populated buildings and even houses of worship, hospitals and schools. The human conscience demands that we uncover the facts concerning all the human rights violations committed during that armed aggression and that we deny impunity to the perpetrators of those crimes.

Targeting a school with an artillery shell is a heinous crime. Nothing could be worse than the targeting of a school used as a shelter for defenceless civilians fleeing the shelling of their homes. What makes it even more heinous is the fact that the targeted building was clearly marked as a United Nations facility. Worst of all, the attacks were repeated. The repetition of those war crimes underscores the fact that they were premeditated and coordinated acts.

Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Abdullah Al-Misnad, Consort of His Highness the Emir of Qatar and UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, promptly condemned the destruction of educational institutions in the Gaza Strip, calling on the Security Council to develop without delay a plan to identify those schools and educational institutions and to mark them in a conspicuous manner so that they might serve as safe havens for students and their parents. She also stressed the importance of allowing humanitarian aid and basic materials to enter those schools and institutions and of allowing the sick and injured to be transported out of them. Prior to that, Her Highness addressed a letter (S/2009/12) to the Security Council calling on it to shoulder its responsibilities and investigate the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation forces against Palestinian civilians, including women and children.

We are now hearing calls from several quarters urging that the perpetrators of war crimes and other violations that occurred in Gaza be brought to justice. Mr. Richard Falk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, recently reported that there was sufficient reason to conclude that the Israeli military operations in Gaza constitute crimes against humanity. The same conclusion has been reached by a number of non-governmental organizations active in the human rights field, including Amnesty International, which indicates that the devastation caused by the recent Israeli invasion of Gaza constitutes a war crime.

Likewise, the organization Physicians for Human Rights believes that the Israeli army violated the rules of ethics and international law by targeting paramedics and by preventing injured people from receiving treatment. Well-known persons such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Ms. Mary Robinson have called for the establishment of a board of inquiry to shed light on the war in Gaza, to conduct an accurate, comprehensive and fair investigation into all accusations related to the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict and to make recommendations regarding appropriate measures to ensure the prosecution of the perpetrators of those violations.

In particular, there is a need to investigate the Israeli army's direct attacks on schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Gaza in order to determine who was responsible for those crimes and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Given the seriousness of targeting United Nations facilities and staff and the need to ensure their safety, we welcome the Secretary-General's establishment of a Board of Inquiry and look forward to its findings.

The dire humanitarian situation facing the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory requires that international donors meet Palestinians' basic needs and finance the reconstruction of what was destroyed by the Israeli war machine. The State of Qatar played a leading role in the international efforts that brought about an end to the Israeli aggression against Gaza — efforts culminating in the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009) on 8 January 2009. Similarly, the State of Qatar has been among the leading supporters of the Palestinian people, both bilaterally and through the decisions of the Council of the League of Arab States. His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of Qatar, took the initiative of convening an emergency Arab summit in Doha to support the Palestinian people, at which he announced the establishment of a fund for Gaza's reconstruction, to which he donated $250 million. In addition, the State of Qatar has sent in-kind assistance to the Palestinians by sea and air and has provided support through the United Nations, the Emir having contributed $40 million to United Nations humanitarian agencies and programmes providing emergency assistance to civilians in Gaza. In addition, long before that, the leadership of the State of Qatar launched the Fakhurah campaign, named for the school shelled by the Israeli army, which raised $110 million through a telethon.

The situation prevailing in the occupied Palestinian territories highlights once again the importance of achieving peace in the Middle East through the peace process, which requires the utmost efforts of the international community. The Security Council must put an end to the double standards and reluctance with which it has addressed an issue that not only poses a direct, serious and clear threat to international peace and security, but also constitutes a grave humanitarian situation. We therefore demand that the Council fully shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations.

If the peace process is to succeed, all segments of the Palestinian population must be involved. It is unacceptable that some are attempting to divide the Palestinian people into Hamas and Fatah factions, as the occupation does not distinguish between the parties, but affects everyone. No national differences should serve as a pretext for Israel to continue its occupation and aggression against unarmed civilians or to divide the Palestinian people or the Palestinian territory. Nor should the Palestinian people be punished for exercising their right to vote in accordance with the principles of democracy that we all advocate.

We call on the Palestinians to achieve unity and reconciliation. In addition, we call on all friendly nations to show their solidarity with the Palestinian people in their plight and to support them in their just struggle to enjoy their legitimate and inalienable rights, in particular the right to independence and self-determination and the right to establish their own State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Bangladesh.

Ms. Jahan (Bangladesh): Thank you, Mr. President, for holding this open debate on a subject that has long been on the Council's agenda — regrettably, however, without any tangible progress. I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East this morning. Against the backdrop of the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the Gaza Strip, my delegation considers this session to be most timely and attaches great importance to it.

The Bangladesh delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In addition, we would like to highlight the following points.

At the outset, let me reaffirm Bangladesh's deep commitment to the cause of Palestine. I also take this opportunity to pledge our continued solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and statehood. Bangladesh reiterates its long-standing position that the continued occupation of Palestine is the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the region. The people of Palestine are being denied their fundamental right to self-determination and the right to live freely in their own land. We believe that the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the only sustainable solution to this long-lasting conflict.

Bangladesh strongly condemns the attacks in Gaza that took a bitter turn in the last week of December 2008, killing and maiming innocent Palestinians, including women and children, and resulting in devastating humanitarian and economic crises. It is alarming to note that not even the humanitarian workers were spared from the atrocities and that the universal symbol of unity and peace — the United Nations compound — is no longer a safe place. We strongly condemn these heinous actions, which are blatant violations of international law. Bangladesh condemns Israel's ongoing illegal settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, which further undermines the Palestinian territory's unity and contiguity. We express our grave concern at Israel's plan to build a museum on the site of an ancient and historic Islamic cemetery and urge its immediate reversal.

Bangladesh stresses the need to conduct a thorough investigation of the heinous crimes and violations committed in the Gaza Strip and hopes that follow-up action will take place immediately thereafter so that the perpetrators of the crime can be brought to justice. We appreciate the Secretary-General's dispatch of a Board of Inquiry to conduct necessary investigation in the Gaza Strip and expect that the Board's findings will be followed up without delay. We also expect that the fact-finding mission called for by the Human Rights Council will be sent immediately.

All concerned must comply with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The United Nations, in particular the Security Council, must undertake necessary measures to ensure the full and effective implementation of that resolution. Border crossings should be opened forthwith and humanitarian workers must be guaranteed full and secure access to Gaza.

It is our belief that, under the continuous defiance and blatant disregard demonstrated by the occupying Power of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, all concerned, including the Security Council and the international community at large must make every effort to oblige Israel to comply with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Road Map.

While we are outraged by the brutal suppression of the Palestinian people by the Israeli forces, we are also frustrated at the factional divisions among the Palestinian people. Such a lack of unity gives the wrong impression and adds fuel to the fire, thus making peace ever more elusive. We believe that unity among the Palestinians is essential in their pursuit of their just cause.

Bangladesh firmly believes that a comprehensive and just resolution of the Palestinian problem is the key to peace in the entire Middle East. The relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Middle East Road Map remain the guiding principles in this regard. Bangladesh hopes that the international community, particularly the permanent members of the Security Council, will no longer shy away from mustering the necessary political will to achieve the much-aspired-to peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Mr. Paul Badji, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Badji (*spoke in French*): At the outset, Sir, allow me to congratulate Libya, a brotherly country to Senegal, on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. You have our every wish for success. I also wish to express appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Yukio Takasu, Permanent Representative of Japan, on the exemplary manner in which he steered the work of the Council in February.

While the massive Israeli assault and the shelling of the Gaza Strip came to an end some two months ago, the Palestinian people still cannot resume their normal lives. We know that more than 1,400 Palestinians, many of them innocent civilians, were killed. We also know that the destruction of homes, farms and infrastructure has been so immense that basic reconstruction will take years and billions of dollars.

What is most shocking is not only the brutality with which the Israeli army undertook its operations in Gaza, but also its soldiers' gross disregard for human life. Indeed, recent accounts by Israeli soldiers now make it clear that there was, in their words, "unbridled contempt for and forcefulness against the Palestinians". As was reported in *Haaretz*, an Israeli squad leader said that most of the men under his command felt that the lives of Palestinians were "far, far less important than the lives of our soldiers". Danny Zamir, head of the Yitzhak Rabin pre-military programme, was quoted by Reuters as saying that the soldiers who had participated in the Gaza operation had also "talked about unwarranted fire on Palestinian civilians".

Israel's decision to conduct an investigation into the soldiers' accounts is welcome but, sadly, will do little to relieve the horrendous suffering endured by the Gazans and will not bring the many innocent civilian victims back to life. Our Committee supports the investigative missions established by the Secretary-General, the Human Rights Council and the League of Arab States, and welcomes similar efforts by a number of international, Palestinian and Israeli non-governmental organizations. We intend to devote one of the international meetings planned for this year to the issue of upholding international humanitarian law and, in that regard, will pay close attention to the results of the ongoing investigations.

Our Committee highly appreciates the international efforts to assist the Palestinian people in the economic and humanitarian areas. The international donor community demonstrated its readiness and generosity at the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held at Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March, by pledging some $4.5 billion to jump-start the immense and urgent task of rebuilding the Gaza Strip. The Committee urges the early fulfilment of these pledges in order to come to the assistance of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

The Committee also commends the outstanding work of United Nations personnel on the ground, first and foremost the staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza, but also their colleagues from other specialized agencies striving to restore the fabric of life of the thousands of Palestinians affected by the war.

For its part, our Committee recently held the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People in Cairo on 10 and 11 March, contributing to the wider international discourse on ways of streamlining and coordinating efforts towards recovery and reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.

While in Cairo, the Committee delegation paid a visit to the Palestine hospital to bear witness to the human toll of the Gaza assault, in a number of highly emotional and heartbreaking encounters with wounded Gazans — mostly children and young people — we were horrified by the severity of their injuries and shocked by the accounts, both from the patients themselves and from the medical personnel, that a number of these cases, for unknown reasons, did not respond to the customary treatment protocols. This, in our view, is something that the international community and the Security Council should very seriously look into. This morning's account by my colleague the representative of Palestine was very much to the point as we stress the responsibility of the international community regarding this issue, which we view as extremely serious.

Our Committee is deeply grateful to the Government of Egypt for its determined support it provides to the Palestinian people by promoting international relief and reconstruction efforts for Gaza, facilitating the much-needed ceasefire and prisoner exchange and sponsoring talks on Palestinian national reconciliation.

Our outrage about the assault on Gaza will not overshadow the Committee's serious concern about the situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel's ongoing and planned expansion of settlements, demolitions of Palestinian houses, land confiscations, construction of the wall on Palestinian land and arbitrary closures continue. We call on Israel, the occupying Power, to halt all illegal policies and practices throughout the Palestinian territory. It should immediately lift the siege on the Gaza Strip and allow uninterrupted humanitarian assistance to enter. We call

on both sides to urgently cease all acts of violence, exercise the utmost restraint and agree on a sustainable ceasefire.

The Committee stresses the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law. We urge the parties to resume negotiations on permanent status, leading to the establishment of a sovereign and viable Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and living side by side with Israel in peace and security. The relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative remain the legitimate foundation for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the conflict.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): I wish to begin, Mr. President, by extending the appreciation of our delegation to you for convening this pertinent and timely meeting on such an important subject. I wish also to join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his important briefing.

My delegation would like to offer due recognition to the recent International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held in Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March 2009, at which some $4.5 billion was pledged by members of the international community. Indonesia is encouraged by the determined commitment of the members of the international community to make a significant contribution to the cause of reconstruction and rehabilitation in the Gaza Strip. The scale of the devastation in the Gaza Strip and the urgency of the needs of the Palestinian people and Palestinian institutions simply cannot wait.

We welcome the 12 February decision of the Secretary-General to set up a Board of Inquiry charged with investigating specific incidents concerning United Nations premises or United Nations operations during the Israeli military attack on the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 19 January 2009. My delegation looks forward to the wide distribution of the report of the Board, once it has been completed.

Indonesia is of the view that, in addition to the Board of Inquiry, which has an understandably limited mandate, an independent commission should be established with the mandate to look into possible crimes against humanity committed during the Israeli military assault and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

While we await that investigation, it is important to draw fresh attention to the horrendous humanitarian challenge existing in Gaza, which cries out for our emphatic response. Regrettably, the level of assistance being allowed into the Strip by Israel falls far short of expectations, given the needs of the people. This situation is being complicated by the lengthy clearance procedures for aid workers, as well as by a variety of items having been banned by Israel. We call on Israel to grant unrestricted humanitarian assistance to all Palestinians who need it. The blockade should be lifted immediately and unconditionally, to permit the movement of people and goods.

Let me also take this opportunity to reiterate once again our outrage at the continuation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory. With the construction of settlements in the West Bank having nearly doubled since 2007, and the Israeli-authority-backed initiative of carrying out new construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the prospects for the two-State solution are steadily declining.

As the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories continues and as Israeli settlers keep encroaching further into the territories, Palestinians will watch their land claims disintegrate before their eyes, making a viable Palestinian State very difficult to achieve.

Israel's settlement policies and practices, which are aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are nothing but a blatant violation of international law. The transfer of civilians to occupied areas, whether or not in settlements that are under military control, is contrary to the sixth paragraph of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which clearly states that "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." Furthermore, settlement activities are also in contradiction with the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, in accordance with the United Nations Charter. As such, they contravene the commitment of Israel to be

faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

If Israel has a genuine commitment to peace, it must stop all settlement construction, expansion and planning in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and dismantle the settlements built therein, in compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In 1980, through its resolution 465 (1980), the Council called on Israel to "dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem" (*resolution 465 (1980), para. 6*). We believe that the Council could take a similar step by pronouncing itself collectively, and with a single voice, to once again urgently demand that Israel dismantle the existing settlements and cease the construction and planning of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

We would also like to underline the importance of inter-Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation. In that regard, we commend Egypt for hosting the inter-Palestinian dialogue. Indonesia wishes to encourage the Palestinian parties to ensure that their national reconciliation talks become an unqualified success. As we have stated in the past, Palestinians have much to gain by coming together. A unified platform will grant them the opportunity to negotiate the future from a position of strength and to meet their objectives. We encourage them to seize that historic opportunity.

Our commitment to an independent, viable and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with its neighbours, is absolute. A just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the relevant resolutions of the Council, must prevail. For its part, the Security Council, in shouldering its Charter-mandated responsibilities, must, and indeed can, exert a positive influence on the Middle East peace process.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Espinosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my country wishes to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this open debate on a topic that concerns all States Members of the Organization. My country would also like to align itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Without prejudice to that, in its national capacity, my delegation wishes to reiterate its great concern at the serious humanitarian and security situation to which the Palestinian civilian population finds itself subjected as a direct result of the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel, the blockade on the provision of humanitarian assistance, food, medicine, fuel and construction materials, the widespread destruction of public and private infrastructure in Palestine and the ongoing military aggression that continues to raise the toll of thousands of dead and wounded Palestinian civilians, including innocent women and children.

In that regard, on behalf of the President of the Republic, Rafael Correa, I wish to reiterate the solidarity of the Government and people of Ecuador with all innocent victims of the ongoing Israeli aggression. At the same time, I would like to make an urgent appeal for an immediate end to the hostilities, a solution to the humanitarian crisis, resolute international economic support to improve the grave living conditions of the affected population and, in particular, a resumed search for a definitive solution and lasting peace in the region, in accordance with all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

As a founding Member of the United Nations, Ecuador is an advocate for the peaceful settlement of international disputes and conflicts and emphatically rejects the threat or the use of force as a means to resolve them. Ecuador therefore believes that any comprehensive solution that makes it possible to achieve and preserve lasting peace in the Middle East must be a political rather than a military one. It must also include the strictest respect for international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Above all, it must include an enduring commitment to non-aggression and recognition that includes the withdrawal of Israel from the territories occupied since 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

To achieve that, my country believes that — without prejudice to the responsibilities of the Security Council established in the United Nations Charter —

there are a number of legal alternatives in other bodies of the international system that could enable the international community as a whole to ensure that justice is done, thereby effectively responding to the urgent appeal of the Palestinian people and, at the same time, paving the way for the restoration of lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

Clearly, that effort must complement other processes that are under way. In particular, we would like to refer to the one recently established by the Human Rights Council to investigate human rights violations perpetrated during the latest attacks on the Gaza Strip at the start of this year. We look forward with great interest and anticipation to the steps to be taken and the handling of that matter by the Human Rights Council, including the special mission that it has requested.

In all those efforts, my country is ready to extend its support and cooperation in developing any initiative aimed at consolidating a lasting peace that would benefit not only the peoples of Palestine and Israel but those of the whole region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Zainuddin (Malaysia): My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf on the Non-Aligned Movement.

We had hoped that this meeting could have been held much earlier, closer to when the guns fell silent over Gaza. With our eyes wide open and fresh memories of the devastation wrought in the wake of the Israeli Operation Cast Lead, our proceedings would have more vividly captured the vast sense of outrage and disappointment that many around the world had expressed for our collective inability to stop the unnecessary killings, injuries and destruction. More so, the prospect for peace in the Middle East was slipping away very fast.

Nonetheless, the convening of this meeting is still timely, albeit two months after the tragedy. It would seem that the world has moved on; or has it? Maybe the world has, but definitely not the Palestinian question. International efforts are afoot to try to rebuild Gaza. Earlier this month, $4.5 billion was pledged at a conference in Sharm el-Sheikh to reconstruct Gaza. That is an effort, among few others, that we commend and applaud, as that contribution will help the survivors to pick up the pieces of their lives shattered by that war.

It seems strange, however, from the perspective of a layman, for someone else to be footing the bill, so to speak, when it is clear who the perpetrator was that caused all that damage and destruction and got off scot-free. Definitely, questions are being raised as to who caused the killing, destruction and maiming of the families who lived in their homes. Where are the perpetrators of those crimes? Why are they not being brought to justice? Is there no recourse to take action against those perpetrators, including prosecuting them for war crimes and crimes against humanity? Is there not enough evidence to bring them to justice? My delegation believes that there is.

Recent action by the International Criminal Court shows us that there is recourse in that direction. Evidence, including testimonies and accounts by Israeli soldiers that war crimes were indeed committed, is beginning to surface.

We await the findings of the Board of Inquiry set up by the Secretary-General to look into incidents involving attacks by Israel on United Nations premises and staff, and we are quite confident about what the outcome will be. Indeed, we welcome the setting up of the Board of Inquiry, but we would have expected it to expand its mandate to include more than just United Nations premises and staff. There should be no distinction between attacks on United Nations premises and staff and attacks on Palestinian civilians and their homes, as they are both clear violations of international law. The Council should consider all the evidence, including the Board of Inquiry's report, with due seriousness and articulate its position on this issue.

We urge the Council not to remain silent on these violations but to act appropriately. We are fearful that inaction on the part of the Council on this matter would signal that it condones these actions and, worse still, justify criminality. Malaysia has called for the establishment of a war crimes tribunal to investigate and prosecute those who committed war crimes during the Gaza war. There have been increasing calls towards this end, including by civil society.

By not taking steps to investigate and prosecute war criminals, we have failed to set the record straight

on the events that transpired during Operation Cast Lead. It is our moral obligation to the survivors to give them at least a sense of closure and succour for their plight. If we do not do that, we risk seeing another generation of Palestinians who have witnessed at close quarters the death of their loved ones become even more radicalized.

We should recall that, notwithstanding the adoption of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), the ceasefire which hangs over Gaza was taken unilaterally. There is no guarantee that Israel will not launch another strike, as it has done time and time again, such as in Lebanon in 2006. The establishment of a war crimes tribunal, inter alia, represents a clear preventive measure against the recurrence of such wanton acts.

Some have argued that the violence on Gaza was self-inflicted. They argued that Israel's attack was justified as it was a response to the rockets fired into towns in southern Israel. My delegation could agree that the war brought on Gaza was not an isolated event but in fact was part of the siege that at that time had lasted 18 months — a siege that has choked Gaza, an open prison to begin with, and cut it off from the outside world. Under this siege, the people in Gaza are forced to cope with the challenges of a humanitarian crisis. For any people, indeed, living under such circumstances would necessarily breed a sense of desperation and despondency for the future. The siege is still in place today and is curtailing the flow of humanitarian aid that is even more necessary now to rebuild Gaza.

In no way does my delegation condone violence, but if some, even among Council members, can find it in themselves to justify the right of Israel to defend itself, can the Palestinians not also invoke this same right, since it is they who have borne the brunt of more than 40 years of the Occupation?

We should continue to focus on the question of the occupation and on abolishing it, by which the Council can contribute to building real security for the region. We should recall that it is the Security Council that adopted resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which lay out the framework for the realization of peace in the Middle East. Israel must cease its policy of annexation of Palestinian lands and its further appropriation of such lands. There must also be a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem.

In this regard, we should also recognize that the Arab countries, through the Arab Peace Initiative, have offered peace and normalized relations with Israel along the lines of the same terms struck in those resolutions. However, my delegation fears that this offer may not remain on the table indefinitely if there is no sincere overture from Israel to achieve peace on equal terms with its neighbours.

Indeed, the actions by the Israelis in no way suggest that they are moving towards finding a peaceful settlement. On the contrary, their actions are hurting the Middle East peace process by making it even harder to realize the vision of a two-State solution — of a viable, territorially contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

The separation wall continues to snake through the West Bank. Its construction complements the intricate system of roadblocks, checkpoints and other barriers that hinder Palestinian movement and prevent Palestinians from engaging in normal economic activities. Illegal settlements continue to be built and expanded in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. To make way for these settlements, Palestinians are forced to abandon their homes by various means including so-called legal means. Palestinians are subject to heavy fines by the Israeli authorities if they fail to comply, which gives rise to reports of Palestinians being forced to tear down their own homes with their own hands.

These illegal settlements also form the base from which illegal settlers launch so much violence and aggression upon Palestinians. The construction and expansion of illegal settlements, which are in clear contravention of Security Council resolutions and, in particular, in violation of the recent understanding reached, with United States mediation, at the Annapolis Peace Conference in November 2007, are a major cause of the failure of the Middle East peace process. Israel must put a stop to these illegal settlements and return this land to its rightful Palestinian owners.

The task for the Council is nothing less than formidable. It is to rebuild the destroyed hope for peace among Palestinians, Israelis and the inhabitants of the wider Middle East, which would have reverberations for the state of international peace and security. It is a task that is even more difficult considering the present situation in Israel and

Palestine. To prod the Middle East peace process forward, the Security Council has no choice but to force Israel to comply fully with the Council's resolutions. My delegation also hopes that intra-Palestinian talks will find a successful conclusion in which we can see a common people come to unity.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this public debate. I should also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing.

As is evident from today's discussion, two months after Israel's savagé assault on Gaza, the situation remains troubling in the highest degree, both in the Gaza Strip and throughout the Palestinian territories. Despite the repeated appeals of the international community to lift it, the intolerable blockade of Gaza remains in place, illegal Israeli practices continue with impunity throughout the Palestinian territories, including the construction of settlement, and the peace process is deadlocked.

Algeria firmly condemns the continued Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territory in violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. It expresses its concern with regard to the negative repercussions on the future of the peace process as a result of Israel's determination to scuttle all diplomatic efforts aimed at bringing about conditions that could restart negotiations.

In order to confront the occupying Power's outlaw behaviour and its headlong rush to repeatedly evade obligations placed upon it by the international community, Algeria calls for unity in the Palestinian ranks and calls upon the international community to lend the support necessary to achieve this prime objective. Algeria supports ongoing efforts at intra-Palestinian reconciliation, with the welcome mediation of Egypt. We welcome the support and constructive role played here by States of the region, which have placed within reach the formation of a government of national unity under the Palestinian Authority for the sole benefit of the Palestinian people and their cause.

The Israeli occupier has no illusions about the importance of this strategic objective and continues to add obstacles and demands aimed at undermining these efforts, whose achievement which would mark the beginning of the reconstruction of Gaza and the moment of truth with regard to Israel's intentions regarding the peace process. In this regard, the remarkable generosity shown at the donor conference for the reconstruction of Gaza, which Algeria joined, clearly illustrates Israel's isolation on the international stage.

Algeria is determined to remind the international community, and the Security Council in particular, of their obligation to complete all investigations of war crimes, crimes against humanity and flagrant violations of international law and international humanitarian law of which Israel is guilty in Gaza, so that serious measures may be taken to bring the perpetrators to justice. An end must be put to the impunity that Israel has displayed for too long at the cost of sacrificing all efforts to achieve peace in the region.

Finally, Algeria would express its unwavering support for Syria and Lebanon in their efforts to recover their legitimate national rights and the territory of which they have been despoiled by the Israeli occupying force. We remain committed to a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict based on international law and the principles defined by the Madrid Conference and by the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express my deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. I also take this opportunity to welcome and congratulate you on assuming your position as President of the Security Council for this month. My delegation also thanks Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his valuable briefing.

The Security Council is meeting today to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The meeting is taking place at a time when tension continues to spread throughout the area due to the disastrous effects of the destructive Israeli war machine in the Gaza Strip including immense destruction that did not spare even United Nations facilities. Our Government therefore reiterates the need for the international community, represented by the Security Council as the organ charged with maintaining international peace and security, to find a

just solution for the Palestinian people that guarantees their right to self-determination and to establish an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, so they may live side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. My Government also emphasizes the need for the international community to work as soon as possible to compel Israel to immediately halt its ongoing illegal settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which seriously threaten the demographic composition and geographic integrity of the Holy City. The international community must also urge Israel to end the blockade of the Gaza Strip and implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 1860 (2009), which calls, inter alia, for the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance, including food, fuel and medical treatment, to citizens throughout Gaza, for the opening of humanitarian corridors and for international efforts to alleviate the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza.

Our Government also notes with satisfaction the results of the Sharm el-Sheikh donor conference and calls upon the parties to expedite the delivery of assistance to the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza, and to begin reconstruction as soon as possible. We also welcome the results of the inter-Palestinian reconciliation talks and look forward to the establishment, as soon as possible, of a national unity Government that responds to the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to emphasize that any solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be achieved without the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and without the return of all of the territories occupied in 1967 including the Syrian Golan, the Lebanese Sheba'a farms and the Lebanese part of Ghajar village. That can only happen through Israel's compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Sangqu (South Africa): We join others in expressing our appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. We also welcome the opportunity to participate and share our views on the issue before the Security Council today. We thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing this morning. South Africa aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The current multifaceted crisis in the Middle East should be understood in the context of the ongoing Israeli military occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories, which dates back to 1967, and the associated denial of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. Indeed, Israel's long track record of disregarding international law and the failure of the Security Council to take any meaningful action in response is the key contributing factor to the lack of progress in the peace process.

It is essential to the maintenance of international peace and security that all parties fully respect and meet their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, and that the Security Council discharge its mandate under the United Nations Charter without selectivity or double standards.

A few months have passed since Israel's most deadly attack on Gaza since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. South Africa wishes to stress the importance of an independent investigation of the events in Gaza and of full accountability for any violations of international law by whomsoever they were committed. In this regard, we welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to establish and dispatch a Board of Inquiry to Gaza. We expect that the Board's report will be presented to the General Assembly and the Security Council so that the necessary follow-up actions can be taken.

While the latest military incursion has come to an end, we should not forget the consequences of the disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks on one of the most heavily populated areas in the world, where the civilian population was denied any means of escaping the onslaught by land, air or sea. It is reported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that 1,455 Palestinians were killed and around 5,000 were injured and that most of the victims were innocent civilians, including women and 431 children. An entire civilian population is traumatized and impoverished. Most of the Gaza infrastructure has been destroyed, including a large number of schools, clinics and hospitals. Israel bears full responsibility for compensating the Palestinian people for its actions.

However, the international community must also take the lead in efforts to rebuild Gaza.

For its part, the South African Government has decided to contribute 1 million rand to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) emergency flash appeal fund. This contribution is designed to supplement the annual contribution to UNRWA and other ongoing South African assistance programmes to Palestine, including its contribution to the Palestinian capacity-building initiative under the aegis of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership. Also, South African civil society is actively assisting the Palestinian people through, inter alia, the provision of medical assistance.

South Africa condemns the continuing Israeli blockade of Gaza and the ongoing construction and expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The continuing construction of the separation wall and the intensified home demolition programmes that we are currently witnessing in East Jerusalem constitute serious violations of international law, as definitively clarified in the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Those activities also undermine all efforts to achieve peace between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

We also call on the Palestinians to stop firing Qassam rockets into Israel. The only lesson that we have been able to learn from those retaliatory actions over the past decades is that they merely provide cover for more violence to be perpetuated against the innocent Palestinian people. We also call upon the Palestinian parties not to be diverted from their objective of forming a new unity Government. In that regard, we support Egypt in its efforts aimed at assisting the Palestinian parties to achieve national reconciliation.

South Africa calls upon the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to fully respect international law, and on the Security Council to discharge its Charter-mandated responsibilities. South Africa continues to support a negotiated and peaceful solution to the conflict on the basis of the principle of land for peace, as expressed in international resolutions and initiatives such as resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, we look forward to a day when the bloodshed ends and two States, Palestine and Israel, are able to coexist in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders. This vision of a two-State solution, as endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1397 (2002), must underpin any permanent settlement of this conflict.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Wetland (Norway): Thank you, Mr. President, for allowing us to speak. Nine weeks ago, the fighting in Gaza came to an end, after the parties each declared unilateral ceasefires. But for the battle-scarred civilian population of Gaza, there has been little improvement. The fragile ceasefires are frequently violated by both sides, and the Israeli embargo remains largely intact. A political solution to the conflict — as opposed to military containment — seems as elusive as ever.

Israeli military operations brought massive suffering and large-scale destruction to the civilian infrastructure in Gaza. But thus far very little has been rebuilt, and the humanitarian situation remains grave. Many families are still homeless and exposed to the cold and the rain. Israel severely restricts the import of basic building materials, such as cement, wood and glass. Food, medicine and fuel are still in short supply. We are concerned that Israel's restrictions on cash transfers to Gaza will impede the essential work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), such as its school programme that feeds 200,000 children.

We recognize Israel's security concerns, but Israel must honour its obligation under international humanitarian law and open its border crossings to Gaza. We welcome the recent Israeli cabinet decision to allow all food items into Gaza, and we look forward to the full implementation of this decision.

The Sharm el-Sheikh conference brought the international community together in a show of support for the Palestinian people. Norway stands by its pledges and is contributing 760 million Norwegian kroner, which is equivalent to $120 million, towards the Palestinian people this year. Without continued budget support to the Palestinian Authority, 77,000 public servants providing basic social services will not receive their salaries. We, the international community, must set aside our differences. Financial and political support for the Palestinians must be directed through existing mechanisms and towards the Palestinian

Authority. The Security Council has given the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, which Norway chairs, a central role in alleviating the situation in Gaza. Norway will in the near future convene a meeting of the Committee, in close consultation with the parties.

The division among Palestinians is a tragedy. The civilian population of Gaza has paid a high price for this division. We support Egypt's efforts to facilitate Palestinian reconciliation and pave the way for an interim Government. The Palestinian people, both in Gaza and the West Bank, deserve a democratic and peaceful Government. At the same time, we warn against placing impossible hurdles to political progress. We must not let the perfect become the enemy of the good. Concerted efforts by the countries in the region and the international community as a whole are necessary to bring the peace process forward.

While the situation in Gaza remains grave, we must not lose sight of the situation in the rest of the Palestinian territory. In violation of the commitments it made, Israel has continued to expand settlements in the West Bank. We are equally concerned by the continued destruction of Palestinian houses and evictions of Palestinian families. Settlements have become an all-too-familiar theme in this Council, but it must be said again that Israeli settlements and closures strangle the Palestinian economy and undermine the prospects for a viable Palestinian State.

Every day that passes without improvement in the lives of the civilian population of Gaza adds to the failure of the parties and, I regret to say, to our collective failure to end the conflict and bring peace to the region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate at this crucial juncture. I also take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Ambassador, on your new assignment as the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations and to wish you every success.

As mentioned by many speakers who took the floor before me, during the period under review, as throughout the past six decades, the Israeli regime has continued its expansionist and destructive policies and practices and its illegal and colonization measures against the Palestinian people. It has also persisted in its aggressive and expansionist policies towards Lebanon and the occupied Syrian Golan. It continues to violate the most basic principles of international law, international humanitarian and human rights law and the United Nations Charter, and persists in its defiance of numerous resolutions of different United Nations bodies, including this Council.

Palestinian civilians continue to be under constant Israeli threat and attacks. The construction of the illegal apartheid wall is continuing unabated despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and in spite of the strong condemnation coming from the international community. Illegal settlements are expanding much faster than in the past, and Palestinian lives and livelihoods continue to be shattered. More and more Palestinian homes are demolished, including those located in refugee camps, as a result of the widest campaign in the past 40 years for the demolition by the Israeli regime of Palestinian homes in the occupied Palestinian territories. This move is undoubtedly orchestrated to illegally alter the demographic composition and character of Palestinian territories, particularly Al-Quds Al-Sharif and its surrounding areas.

The international community has not forgotten, nor will it ever forget, the Israeli atrocities in the Gaza Strip. Every day, new faces of this regime's war crimes, and of crimes against humanity perpetrated against the innocent Palestinians during its aggression against the Gaza Strip, are revealed and new revelations in this regard emerge, causing more and more outrage across the globe. The recent reports by United Nations human rights rapporteurs, including that prepared by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, clearly indicate and illustrate some aspects of the Israeli crimes against innocent Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Those reports attest to the appalling fact that, in the Zionist regime's aggression against Gaza, civilian targets, particularly homes and their occupants, basic infrastructure, schools, medical facilities and innocent civilians, including women and children, have been callously and deliberately targeted.

There are many shocking accounts of Israeli crimes contained in those reports. For example, it is mentioned that in one case, among many other similar cases,

> "Israeli soldiers shot a father after ordering him out of his house and then opened fire into the room where the rest of the family was sheltering, wounding the mother and three brothers and killing a fourth."

Those reports cite yet another inhumane practice that is in violation of the most basic principles of international humanitarian and human rights law: Israeli soldiers used children as human shields. It is mentioned in these reports that for instance,

> "on January 15, at Tal al Hawa, south-west of Gaza City, Israeli soldiers forced an 11-year-old boy to walk in front of them for several hours as they moved through the town, even after they had been shot at".

Israeli soldiers are also confessing to the crimes they have committed against the Palestinian people during their aggression on Gaza. An Israeli commander who was present during the aggression against Gaza just recently told various international news agencies, "If you want to know whether I think that we killed innocents, the answer is unequivocally yes".

The news reports regarding the tee shirt designs made for Israeli soldiers that encouraged them to shoot children and pregnant Palestinian mothers are another indication of the criminal policies and practices of the said regime, as well as of the depths of its atrocities in its aggression against the Gaza Strip. Appalling captions, such as "1 shot, 2 kills" printed on a tee shirt depicting a pregnant Palestinian, or the shocking caption of "The smaller, the harder" on another tee shirt depicting a child, are indicative of the atrocious and criminal nature of the Israeli regime's policies and practices in its aggression against the Palestinians and other Arab peoples in the region.

There is now more than enough evidence for the international judicial mechanism to move expeditiously to bring Israeli war criminals to justice. The calls from international public opinion to not allow these crimes to go unpunished should be heard and heeded. The Security Council has an important responsibility to discharge in that regard.

We thank the Secretary-General for his efforts in establishing a Board of Inquiry and dispatching it to Gaza, as well as for his commitment to report back to the Security Council on the findings of the Board. We await that report and expect that more concerted steps will be taken by the United Nations to hold the Israeli war criminals accountable for their atrocities in Gaza. The credibility of the United Nations is at stake. International public opinion is closely watching how the Security Council, and the United Nations in general, will deal with these crimes.

As several human rights mandate-holders have underlined in their reports recently, the suffering and torment of the Palestinian people caused by the inhuman Israeli blockade should be ended immediately. The Israeli regime should be forced to end the crippling blockade on Gaza and allow immediate and unimpeded access by the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to humanitarian assistance, including food, medical supplies, fuel and construction materials. We hope that the Security Council will take meaningful steps to compel the regime to end its blockade, which has brought about an unprecedented humanitarian crisis for the innocent Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

I wish to conclude by stressing that my delegation rejects the unfounded allegations made against the Islamic Republic of Iran by the representative of the Zionist regime in today's meeting of the Council. Nothing could be more preposterous than to hear the representative of a regime that has no respect for the most basic standards of humanity and decency, with its known record of State terrorism and its possession of a nuclear arsenal, levelling baseless allegations against others.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a pleasure for me to welcome you, Mr. President, a brother representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, a country that is a friend of Nicaragua, and to see you leading this debate. Without a doubt, your experience and knowledge will contribute to the success of this debate. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for the report he gave us this morning.

As stated by Dr. Kevin Cahill, Chief Adviser for Humanitarian Affairs of the President of the General

Assembly and his special envoy on the situation in Gaza,

> "Seeing Gaza in February 2009, shortly after the Israeli invasion, reminds me of engravings of Dante's *Inferno*. The level of destruction recalled images from Dresden or Hiroshima at the end of the Second World War. There were areas in the northern Gaza Strip in which not a single structure was left standing."

The primary responsibility for resolving the Palestinian problem lies with the United Nations, and specifically with the Security Council, which has simply not acted in conformity with its mandate under the Charter of the United Nations. Why was the Security Council unable to act and call for a ceasefire in the course of 22 days of aggression, knowing that this was not a mere skirmish but rather a total massacre against the Palestinian people? Is there any other example in today's world of an invading occupying country being able to settle more than half a million colonists on the territory of the occupied country without being sanctioned even once by society, as represented in the United Nations? We want to condemn and to emphasize the illegality of these actions, which are tantamount to a de facto annexation that undermines the integrity, contiguity, viability and unity of the Palestinian territory, thereby jeopardizing the very establishment of a State.

What is worse, however, is that the situation continues to be the same as when Dr. Cahill witnessed it. Rebuilding has not yet begun, because Israel will not allow the import of steel, cement or glass, among other building materials. The people of Gaza have lived under hostile occupation for more than four decades. In recent years, there has been a continuous reduction in all imports and exports, which has served to slowly strangle the economy. That has led to one of the highest rates of unemployment and among the lowest levels of nutrition in the developing world. Even the import of lentils, pasta and tomato juice has been restricted, based on the incomprehensible logic that such items could pose a threat to the security of Israel.

Military controls have been imposed through grinding force and a level of disregard that clearly illustrates the intention to crush the human dignity of the proud and heroic Palestinian people. The daily humiliation at border crossings and in the course of constant incursions by Israeli soldiers, as well as the herding together of people, reveal a consistent and generalized pattern on the part of the occupation. The Council must demand that all crossing points be opened and that people and goods be allowed free access. In particular, the Council must demand humanitarian access to the Palestinian population, which has yet to recover at all from the latest aggression.

In his report to the Human Rights Council, Mr. Richard Falk, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, indicated that the number of dead Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip was six times as high as the number of heroic combatants killed. That illustrates that no distinction was made between civilian and military targets. He also underscored the fact that Israel also used all sorts of weapons against densely populated areas, including aeroplanes, heavy weaponry and even prohibited weapons. The forced confinement of Gaza's civilian population to the zone of conflict during the operation denied them the option of finding sanctuary. Such a policy must be viewed as a new type of crime against humanity. The Rapporteur also stated that people in Gaza holding foreign passports were allowed to leave the territory, while Palestinians — including the sick, disabled, orphaned, elderly and injured — were denied that option. The Special Rapporteur requested an in-depth investigation into the abuses committed, emphasizing the need to draw on the relevant experiences and rulings of the principal international courts.

We wish to take this opportunity to request that the Secretary-General distribute the report containing the conclusions and recommendations of the Board of Inquiry be dispatched to Gaza. We have no doubt that that new report will further inform the international community about the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and that its recommendations will be of great importance for future action by the Security Council and the General Assembly. We also wish to emphasize the importance of the immediate dispatch of the Human Rights Council fact-finding mission.

My Government supports the adoption of the measures necessary to ensure that Israel withdraws totally and unconditionally from the occupied territories, that those responsible for Israel's war crimes and crimes against humanity against the

Palestinian people — including genocide and ethnic cleansing — are prosecuted, that the peace process is intensified and that the Palestinian people can exercise their inalienable right to self-determination on the basis of the borders prior to 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as their capital.

My Government supports negotiations to achieve reconciliation among all Palestinian forces and to form a government of unity and reconciliation whose representatives can sit down, united and strong, at the negotiating table with the occupying Power and its allies. The entire Non-Aligned Movement will stand with them.

Nicaragua expresses its solidarity with the Government and the people of Lebanon and calls on Israel to end the occupation of northern Ghajar and the adjacent area north of the Blue Line and to avoid any violation of the sovereignty and independence of Lebanese territory. We also demand a swift resolution of the issue of the Shaba'a farms with full respect for the territorial integrity of Lebanon, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006). In addition, we join with others in demanding, as a matter of humanitarian concern, that Israel provide maps of the mines that it planted during its attacks on Lebanon. Thus, we could prevent many deaths.

My Government also expresses its solidarity with the people and the Government of Syria and condemns Israel's illegal occupation of the Golan Heights. It should be recalled that any change intended to alter the physical, legal, demographic or institutional character of the Golan Heights or any measure to impose Israeli jurisdiction and administration there is contrary to international law and null and void.

Accordingly, Nicaragua will continue to support all measures, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, that will help us to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and, in particular, to ultimately establish a free, sovereign and independent State of Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Zoubi (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, and the sisterly Libyan Arab Jamahiriya on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the current month and to congratulate your predecessor, who skilfully conducted the work of the Council last month.

My delegation wishes to align itself with the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Palestinian question continues to be at the core of the conflict in the Middle East, and there continues to be an urgent need to find a peaceful solution that will lead to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace accepted by all parties. There is no alternative to the two-State solution. All parties must seriously engage in negotiations targeted at achieving the only possible solution: an independent Palestinian State. Peace and stability in the region and for its peoples can be achieved only through a peaceful solution based on the two-State vision.

The peace to which Arabs aspire is one based on the restoration of the Palestinian people's legitimate rights, including their right to establish an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, which is a basic attempt to address all aspects of the Israeli-Arab conflict. In that regard, Jordan welcomes the efforts of the Quartet. We commend the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations, including the Security Council, and approve of the positive moves by the United States Administration in embarking directly on peace efforts. We also commend and appreciate the international support for efforts to find a solution to the problems in the Middle East, and we hope that it will be reciprocated by all parties concerned.

Jordan condemns all unilateral measures and practices that obstruct the peace process, in particular the settlement activities being carried out in East Jerusalem. Moreover, the natural growth in the existing settlements in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, threatens the negotiations on final status and runs counter to Israel's obligations. Such activities remain an obstacle to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State.

Israel, the occupying Power, must refrain from any attempts to change the character of East Jerusalem, including excavations near the Al-Aqsa mosque, and

put an end to its aggressions against Islamic sites, notably the historic Ma'man Allah cemetery, which contains the tombs of prominent Arab and Muslim personages, and to its attempts to deface or eliminate its Islamic and Arab features and to build a museum over it. Israel must halt those illegal and sacrilegious activities and respect Jordan's special and historical role in preserving those Muslim holy sites, in accordance with the provisions of the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty.

The Security Council should exert pressure on Israel to put an immediate end to its aggressions, which can only increase tension in the region. Israel's unilateral and illegal measures, which seek to create new facts on the ground, to eliminate Jerusalem's Arab and Islamic character and alter its legal status, constitute aggressions against the rights of the Palestinian people, sacred Muslim shrines and the Islamic heritage, whose preservation has been called for by UNESCO. Those measures run counter to all international norms and resolutions calling on Israel to maintain the historic sites and religious shrines in Jerusalem.

Israel must fully lift its blockade on Gaza, open all crossing points and refrain from obstructing the efforts of humanitarian relief agencies to meet humanitarian needs and provide medical treatment. The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains desperate. Gaza must be rebuilt, and the devastating effects of the Israel invasion must be addressed.

My delegation hopes that the Security Council will seriously and expeditiously consider the report of the Board of Inquiry established to investigate Israeli against United Nations facilities in Gaza. Jordan is fully committed to supporting its Palestinian brothers and sisters, alleviating their suffering and providing them with humanitarian assistance through Hashemite philanthropic agencies. We also stand ready to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance provided by other States and entities. Typically, between 18 and 24 trucks leave Jordan daily. As of 18 March, a total of 47 convoys, comprising 804 trucks, have left Jordan since the aggression against Gaza.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Australia.

Mr. Hill (Australia): The Australian Government remains committed to the Middle East peace process and to the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The tragic events of December and January have underlined yet again the vital importance of efforts towards Middle East peace. Australia was deeply saddened by the recent conflict in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel and its humanitarian cost. Australia condemns any ongoing rocket and mortar fire perpetrated by Hamas as a threat to peace in the region.

We recognize the importance of the Gazan people's having access to humanitarian and other assistance so that rebuilding and reconstruction can take place, and call on Israel to do all it can to help increase the flow of humanitarian goods and other necessary supplies into the Gaza Strip.

Australia believes that the priority for both sides remains just as much as ever the pursuit of a two-State solution to the conflict based on the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to a viable State of their own and Israel's right to live in peace within secure borders. It is also essential that members of the international community lend their support. In this regard, we recognize and commend efforts, such as the Arab Peace Initiative, towards a broader Middle East peace. We also commend the role Egypt has played and strongly support a durable and fully respected ceasefire, as called for in resolution 1860 (2009). We welcome Palestinian reconciliation, which should be consistent with Quartet principles.

Australia recognizes the vital importance of recovery and reconstruction efforts and the central role of the Palestinian Authority in this regard. That is why Australia was pleased to announce at Sharm el-Sheikh a contribution of $20 million to assist the efforts of the Palestinian Authority, with United Nations agencies and other donors, to meet the recovery and reconstruction needs of the Palestinian people. This assistance builds on the $10 million which Australia had already committed in January for emergency and humanitarian relief through United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, and the $45 million provided in 2008. Australia stands ready to provide whatever further practical assistance we can.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Park In-kook (Republic of Korea): It is very unfortunate and deplorable that, two months after the declaration of unilateral ceasefires, the situation in the

Gaza Strip is still fragile and a proper ceasefire regime is yet to be established. Moreover, as we have heard today, all too many Gazans, most of whom have nothing to do with the cause of the conflict, are still suffering from the lack of basic goods and supplies such as food, nutrition, shelter and proper medical supplies due to the aftermath of the January conflict. This unjustifiable misery and the humanitarian suffering of the population of Gaza must be stopped immediately.

In this vein, my delegation joins many others that have spoken before us in urging all parties directly concerned to work to establish a durable and fully respected ceasefire agreement at the earliest juncture, secure unimpeded passage for humanitarian aid to the suffering people in Gaza, and take all necessary measures to fully implement resolution 1860 (2009). The effective provision of international aid and the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip depend on the creation of a stable environment. In order to enable long-term development and help people to engage in their everyday lives, Israel and Palestine must work diligently for an enduring peace settlement.

Three weeks ago, representatives of 72 countries and 12 international organizations gathered together at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to discuss ways to assist in the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip following its destruction during the January military conflict. At the meeting, nearly $5 billion were pledged to aid the early recovery and reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. The fact that so many countries congregated and offered to mobilize so much capital in such a short time clearly represents our shared desire and hope for enduring peace and security in the Gaza Strip and the Middle East.

However, it should be remembered that, regardless of how many resources are mobilized or donors committed to pledged contributions, the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and, more broadly, long-term economic development in the area cannot be pursued unless all parties directly concerned demonstrate strong political will for peace and exercise restraint. All the assistance of the international community will be in vain unless substantial progress is made in the peace process. Those directly concerned should shoulder the primary responsibility for peace and reconstruction in the Middle East. With the United Nations and the international community, Korea stands ready to provide our support to the peace process between Israel and Palestine and to the reconstruction and long-term development of the Palestinian territories.

Since we have a vivid memory of the misery of war ourselves, Korea promptly provided relief aid to the Palestine refugees in Gaza through the International Committee of the Red Cross shortly after the conflict arose in the Gaza Strip last January. Korea also has the experience of a nation and community rebuilding from the destruction of war. We are ready to share this experience to assist in reconstructing the Gaza Strip and pursue longer-term economic development in the Palestinian territories. The Korean Government has already pledged $15 million in assistance to the Palestinians in 2009 and 2010, including an additional $2 million-worth of assistance.

My delegation assures you, Sir, and the Security Council that Korea will continue to contribute to the reconstruction and humanitarian relief efforts for the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian territories.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of Mali.

Mr. Daou (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, and your country, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for your initiative to convene this open debate on the very important issue of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Indeed, the Middle East, as the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, might have served as a true bridge between the peoples of the world. Regrettably, however, for several decades it has remained a zone of tension. Instability in that part of the world naturally affects all other regions of the planet. Need I recall that no issue more fully encapsulates all the resentments prevalent in the region than the Palestinian question?

We believe that the settlement of the problem can no longer be postponed. The outlines of a peaceful settlement to the conflict, involving the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State living in peace and security within secure and recognized borders alongside the State of Israel, have long been well defined. It is therefore high time to work to achieve that noble objective.

In that regard, it is important to ensure the effective implementation of the relevant resolutions of

our Organization, especially those of the Security Council, including resolution 1860 (2009) of 8 January, which calls for a ceasefire, the lifting of the blockade against Gaza and the resumption of negotiations with a view to reaching a comprehensive peace. We call for the timely resumption of the peace process and encourage Egypt's efforts to achieve reconciliation among the Palestinians.

The situation has become all the more critical as a result of Israel's recent aggression against the Gaza Strip, which not only exacerbated the rift between the Israeli and Palestinian communities, but also and above all unleashed a humanitarian disaster in Gaza. We commend the Secretary-General's initiative to dispatch a fact-finding mission to Gaza in order to investigate war crimes committed by the Israeli army. We also applaud the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other humanitarian organizations, who are doing outstanding work in the field.

Allow me to reiterate the constant and tireless support of the people and Government of Mali for the just and noble cause of the Palestinian people on the path to comprehensive peace, which we all fervently desire. Mali remains firmly convinced that, with the support of the international community and the solidarity of all peace- and justice-loving peoples, the valiant people of Palestine will regain their national rights, especially their right to a sovereign and independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): I, too, would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing this morning. It is also a pleasure to see you, Mr. President, presiding over this meeting.

A lot has been said here today. A lot has been expressed in terms of a lot of hope and in terms of what the future holds. I believe that peace is slowly becoming a word in the world lexicon of diplomacy that actually means "do nothing", and that is a very sad comment on where mankind is headed.

I know for a fact that the Jewish community faced a horrible diaspora. I read about it in history. As a historian, the way they were dispersed was abhorrent to me. As a person who read about the Warsaw ghettos, who read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and who enjoyed the great music that they created internationally and the very strong traditions of culture that they brought to the Abrahamic religions and communities as their forerunners, I know that they were in many ways a model of fortitude. Those who had faced an Armageddon surely would know better than to create one.

I read in the press recently the statements of young, idealistic soldiers of the Israeli army and saw how they spoke about how a fervour of religious war was encouraged in them to make them go out and face the Gaza Strip and what was happening there. It is a sad day when we play these games that create divisions in the world.

I know for a fact that Muslims have a long and old tradition. At one stage, after the very horrible persecution of the community, when registers were drawn up in Spain, the Muslim caliphs who at that time ruled Jerusalem invited the first return of the diaspora back to Jerusalem. It was the Ottoman caliphs who reinducted, at a later stage, a member of the community into the Jerusalem council. This is history. I believe that to give this a tinge of a holy war, as I read in the papers today, is a sad, sad statement.

It is an even sadder statement because, in many ways, as I have said earlier, some of the very strong leads for civilization come from the Jewish community. Its travails are a part of history. Who has not read Leon Uris? Have we not all sympathized with what happened? Then, if you have faced all this, how can you inflict such things on others? The one thing that the various books and various prophecies have revealed is the enormous fortitude, enormous patience and enormous caring for the people of God. Are we all not the children of God? We are.

Therefore, I feel that this is the time to make the statement that one would expect better. The world looks upon Israel as a role model in the West. How many children do we know in homes across America and Europe who play with little toys that can sometimes cause immense damage? How many do we know about who have actually, through an incendiary device, accidentally killed thousands of people, even in the city of New York? Yesterday they had a day of remembrance for many people who died due to a fire. To retaliate, then, with the might of an empire, with thousands killed in a reprisal, this is regrettable.

It is more regrettable because it comes from a people who should be known in history for their resilience, their fortitude and their courage. Those beliefs do not make you weak, they make you strong. But strength does not come through dominating others. That is why a little, defiant David shot the sling that killed Goliath. The issue was, however, that he remained a personable person and remembered that his strength was not to be used to inflict harm on the innocent. That is a lesson we should take from history.

The unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict remains a severe thorn in the side of the United Nations and the world community. There is a lack of any tangible process. We hear of the peace process, we hear of road maps. It is amazing. I never fully understood the words "one step forward and two steps back" until this particular part of the world proved to me that this is something to be believed. We have seen hopes repeatedly dashed and international incidents created out of relatively small events. We have seen the stark violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. We have seen draconian policies and practices. We have seen the fragmentation and the absolute fracture of Palestinian society. We have seen walls built.

Amazingly, the greatest wall in the world, the Great Wall of China, could not keep the marauders out for too long, but certainly kept a lot of people in who could not escape the vicious practices of many empires. Does this create hope? Does this create a better system? Does this create something that the world can be proud of? I think the right to personal movement and unabated settlement activity are creating new aspects on the ground. The continuing inhumane and unlawful siege of the Gaza Strip has transformed it virtually into an open prison, where hundreds of thousands are living lives of abject misery, so near to the Mediterranean and the civilized world of the Greeks, where it all starts from, yet bombed into the Dark Ages. The world at large has witnessed much cruelty, and more cruelty, as a mere spectator: the haunting memories of the devastation inflicted on the innocent population of Gaza, the killing of five sisters through a shot in the window for no apparent reason.

I do not know how anyone is going to justify any of that. But where is the moral outrage that translates itself into something tangible — a meaningful change in the lives of the Palestinians? While Israel deserves criticism, no less responsible is the international community, which is complicit in its inaction. The proverbial water off a duck's back rings true here. The attacks on the United Nations buildings and personnel itself showed complete disrespect. It was not the physical damage caused alone, but the icon that tumbled and crumbled with a lot of innocence inside. The Secretary-General's initiative for a Board of Inquiry is welcomed by us.

But we must not lose sight of the larger picture. The general sense of pessimism around the peace process does not augur well. The international community needs to refocus its attention and to synergize its energies and its efforts to reinvigorate the peace process of negotiation and to address all core issues for a comprehensive and just settlement and for the durable solution for which the parameters already exist, namely, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and of the General Assembly, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid Peace Conference terms of reference, the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principles set out at the Annapolis Conference. There must also be parallel progress on the Israel-Syria and Israel-Lebanon tracks for a comprehensive peace in the region.

In conclusion, an early comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the core issue of Palestine, should be our collective strategic objective. All Member States must throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. Indeed, that would have a positive impact on regional and international peace and security and help stabilize other simmering situations across the region. While remaining fully committed to the just cause of the Palestinian people, Pakistan will continue to play its rightful role in the collective endeavour to establish lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Escalona Ojeda (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, Mr. President, to greet you very respectfully and to express, on behalf of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, our appreciation to you for the important work that you have been doing at the helm of the Security Council. We acknowledge your resolute commitment to peace and the

defence of the sovereignty of the peoples of the world, in particular of Palestine.

When our Government, through the Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations, expressed its views on the Middle East crisis and on the situation in Palestine in this body, we warned of the urgent need to prevent the Government of Israel from committing, through its war machine, what we predicted would be a crime against humanity. Those 22 days of occupation and aggression between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, according to figures provided by the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, have borne that out.

During the occupation, 1,434 Palestinians died, of whom 235 were combatants, 239 police officers and 960 civilians, including 288 children and 121 women. Also, 5,303 Palestinians were wounded, of whom 1,606 were children and 828 women. Even today, most have not been able to return to a normal life as a result of war-inflicted injuries. In the world's memory, there has never been such callousness displayed before our very eyes.

Our Government is emphatic in denouncing the flagrant violation of international law and of the human rights of the Palestinian people in Gaza. The ineffective application of resolution 1860 (2009) of 8 January 2009, which has still not been implemented, brought about the tragedy that we deplore today. The resolution, in which the Security Council called for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, sadly illustrated the inaction of the major Powers in urging Israel to stop the attacks against Gaza. Nor has the blockade been lifted; nor is there free transit to allow humanitarian aid to enter and to put an end to Gaza being a prison and concentration camp.

We must remember that the Bolivarian Government of President Hugo Chávez Frías decided to expel the Israeli Ambassador to our country for disproportionate and unjustifiable military action against the Palestinian people. United Nations Special Rapporteur Richard Falk himself urged the Organization "to take urgent action to protect a civilian population being subjected to collective punishment that amounts to a crime against humanity". At that time, Mr. Falk believed that the International Criminal Court should investigate the situation in order to establish if the Israeli civilian and military leaders responsible for the Gaza siege should be indicted and tried for violations of international criminal law.

Today, we note that despite General Assembly resolution ES-10/8, adopted by the General Assembly at its resumed tenth emergency special session on illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, held on 15 and 16 January 2009, which called for an end to the occupation, the Israeli aggression continues. United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories Richard Falk has again reported that Israel committed massive violations during the 22 days of its invasion of the Gaza Strip. He confirmed that the bombings carried out by Israeli forces on the Palestinian civilian population constituted a massive violation of international humanitarian law. The report of the Special Rapporteur will be very important for the Human Rights Council in Geneva to confirm that the Israeli Government committed war crimes under the Geneva Conventions. The findings of the United Nations expert are conclusive. The Israeli army carried out crimes such as the deliberate execution of women and children by sharpshooters. It deliberately destroyed infrastructure such as schools, universities, public services, electricity and water systems and 21,000 homes, thus worsening the already negative human development indicators and dragging the population of Gaza to the lowest levels of poverty.

The Government of Israel cannot indefinitely remain beyond international laws. Complacency and complicity clearly have negative consequences on Palestinians every day. Worse yet, however, they create a precedent that could affect all countries, including as regards international impunity, which could create an environment for the destabilization of the international system. Hence, it is important to establish criminal responsibility for what took place, lest the Security Council lose even further credibility and legitimacy.

Our criticism of the Israeli Government and Israeli army policy of genocide cannot be mistaken for anti-Semitism. The Bolivarian Government respects the Jewish people and its religious beliefs and practices. In Venezuela, Jewish communities enjoy full guarantees that their culture, economic well-being and social aspirations will be respected — as befits a tolerant, multi-ethnic and multicultural country that demonstrates tolerance both to those born in Venezuela and to immigrants. Our respect is extended to Jewish people in Venezuela and throughout the world.

We believe in the importance of all initiatives towards the attainment of peace in the Middle East, in particular the demand by Palestine as a nation for peace, respect for its sovereignty and the full development of its people. The League of Arab States is playing a fundamental role in that regard. The United Nations must stress the need to meet the urgent needs of the population and bring about lasting peace. That will be possible only if justice is systematically sought.

It is a fact that there can be no peace in the Middle East so long as the occupation continues, so long as the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination is denied, so long as inhumane and degrading practices continue daily against thousands of Palestinians, and so long as colonization, carried out through Israeli settlements, continues.

In the midst of its tragedy, Palestine has produced great poets, lending distinction to the memory of its people. I shall conclude by quoting from "Homeland," by the Palestinian poet Ibrahim Nasrallah.

> "Under the yoke of our mornings
> The sun crumbles
> And in the darkness of our steps
> Our panting breath is on fire
> These incomplete homelands
> In which we appear to be
> Nothing more than prisoners of war."

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Israel has asked for the floor, and I call on him now.

Mr. Weissbrod (Israel): I will not take much of the Council's time, but will only make a short remark on the speeches of the representatives of Syria and Iran. It is astonishing that countries that continue to actively support terror, sabotage the peace process and encourage suicide bombings and that continue to smuggle arms to the region — Lebanon and Gaza — in these very days and these very moments are lecturing us about the peace process, moral values and human rights records. I suggest to those countries and to some other Member States that spoke to dig into their own human rights records before speaking about others. In Israel, we are proud of the sense of self-criticism that we have as a society and as a State. We hope that countries like Syria and Iran, and some other Member States that spoke, will have a bit of that sense of self-criticism.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor, and I call on him now. I would ask that he be brief.

Mr. Falouh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for taking the floor again. I wish only to respond to the statement just made by the representative of Israel. That statement included misleading claims and distortions of the truth, which form part of Israel's desperate campaign to deflect the attention of world public opinion from the activities, atrocities and holocaust daily carried out by the terrorist State of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Any attentive and wise observer will immediately see that the Israeli representative's claims and allegations today are intended to camouflage Israeli violations of the sovereignty of Lebanon and of resolution 1701 (2006). The reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) underscore that Lebanon's Common Border Force, which comprises the four main relevant Lebanese Government agencies, has not found any instance of arms smuggling. That very significant information is in line with previous statements of senior Lebanese officials and the findings of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Teams I and II.

Israel's statements do not alter the fact that Israel possesses the largest, blackest record of terrorism, which would need an encyclopaedia, a museum and an archive to document and shed light on the crimes of genocide, war crimes and ethnic cleansing carried out against the Palestinians, the Syrians, the Lebanese, the Egyptians, the Jordanians and others by Israel throughout its bloody history.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran has asked for the floor, and I call on him now.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am not going to take very much of the Council's time, because we have already placed on record my country's position. I just wanted to reiterate that we reject the baseless allegations raised yet again by the representative of the Israeli regime. Undoubtedly — and needless to say — these are statements that are made only to distract the international community's attention from where it should be, and that is the Israeli

crimes and atrocities, which are very well known to the international community. Time and again they have been emphasized not only by Iran and some of the other countries that the representative of Israel mentioned, but actually by the whole membership of the Council and by the whole international community. We are on record as condemning in the strongest terms all those crimes and atrocities, which are perpetrated against the Palestinian people. Indeed, the Israeli regime has actually displayed one of the clearest examples of State terrorism. The State terrorism which is being practised by the Israeli regime, together with the nuclear weapons that are in the hands of that regime and also coupled with its wicked behaviour, poses one of the greatest threats that the region and the international community are facing today.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.